BISS Biodiversity Information Science and Standards

Biodiversity Information Science and Standards 2: e26375
doi: 10.3897/biss.2.26375

OPEN ACCESS

Conference Abstract

The Biggest Museum Project in Czech History: The New Permanent Natural History Exhibitions in the National Museum Prague

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Received: 02 May 2018 | Published: 13 Jun 2018

Citation: Macek I (2018) The Biggest Museum Project in Czech History: The New Permanent Natural History Exhibitions in the National Museum Prague. Biodiversity Information Science and Standards 2: e26375. https://doi.org/10.3897/biss.2.26375

Abstract

In 2018 the National Museum Prague (NMP) is celebrating its 200th anniversary. Today the Museum is facing its most valuable development: brand new permanent exhibitions. Our monumental historic building was constructed in 1891 in the heart of Prague. After more than one hundred years we had to close the building and remove all exhibitions which were older than 40 years. The building has about 8,000m^2 and is divided into two parts. One belongs to our Natural History Museum (NHM) collections with Zoology, Palaeontology, Mineralogy, Botany and Mycology exhibitions. Our new natural history galleries will open in autumn 2019. Housed all on one floor, the galleries will be full of animals like invertebrates, fishes, reptiles, birds and mammals. The second floor will focus on palaeontology spanning more than 500 million years of evolution covering the geographical area of the modern Czech Republic.

At the beginning we had to ask ourselves a few simple questions. How do we develop permanent exhibitions that will last for decades? Is excluding modern technology the right thing to do? Should we focus on a more informative/education style or should the interpretation be more populist? And what about the display cases? Should we use old repaired ones or modern cases?

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It would be great to have answers to all these questions but we still have to deal with the vision and constraints of our curators, collections, budget, legislation, technology and construction of the building.

The project has no similar equivalent in the history of the Czech Republic so it was an extraordinary challenge to create our own process of developments with ongoing improvements. Through these developments we have formed new cooperation with technological partners and the creative industries. We are defining a new modern approach to the development and preparation of exhibitions in the Czech Republic. Now that we have reached the half way point towards our vision, it is a good time to report on progress.

Keywords

Zoology, Palaeontology, exhhibition development,

Presenting author

Ivo Macek

Funding program

National Treasure

Grant title

New permanent exhibitions in National Museum